



SUNDAY 19 MARCH 2023

DIOCESE OF Hexham & Newcastle

The Parishes of: Bishop Auckland || Newton Aycliffe & Shildon || Willington  
Crook, Tow Law & Wolsingham || Tudhoe || Coundon, Ferryhill & Windlestone

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## ESCOMB PARTNERSHIP NOTE

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### 4th Sunday of Lent (A): John 9: 1-41

Alice is blind. She's also deaf. When I first met her I started to finger spell on her hand but she was streets ahead of me. She sussed out the remainder of my slowly evolving sentence and replied with a firm staccato voice. Over time I got to know her as a well-travelled, very intelligent woman who read two or three braille books a week.

We all contrive to manage whatever infirmities, handicaps or inabilities we have - there's none of us perfect. But I'm impressed frequently by the skills and practical ways individuals develop to get through the day or the next hour or the next few minutes even. The inventiveness and sheer application to tasks requiring simple or complex efforts leaves me feeling frankly humbled.

Alice interprets textures, temperatures, winds and weather, tastes of liquids, sweets and savories, picking up geographical clues from the smell of a hot dog stall, of coffee, of the local takeaway. I asked her once whether sight or sound would be the sense she'd most prefer. Her answer was quick and direct—sight. She'd known both as a child before illness robbed her of what we take for granted, setting her on a radical path of re-learning that never ends. Dependent and grateful as she is, she teaches us - if we're ready to learn.

Today's Gospel story shows us Jesus giving sight to a man born blind. Stop reading now. Close your eyes. Think how you'd get to your front door, manage the stairs successfully or walk down the street without your sight. The wonder and enormity of this gift to this man is stunning. Sit and think about it. The religious authorities of the time didn't appreciate it. Wrongly they attributed blindness to sins of his parents. Instead of rejoicing in this man's miracle they were incensed that he'd been healed on the Sabbath. Jobsworths. Who's blind here?

Perhaps lack of familiarity with blind people leaves us not knowing whether to offer or how to help. Do we see a person lacking something or appreciate the dignity of someone who challenges us to think and to serve? Individuals can be too readily boxed and labelled as this or that without our taking time and steps to engage and to learn about specific needs and strengths rather than to assume generalized notions gained from wherever.

Jesus sees individuals. He inspires faith and trust that like a pair of specs enable us to see differently. I've always been inspired by the life of Helen Keller, by David Blunkett's sense of public service, but Alice grounded me because I met her and had to relate, to learn, to be taught and challenged. Some of our church prayers ask the Lord to 'open the eyes of our minds' (Ephesians 1:18). It's not comfortable to admit that our minds are closed, that we live with our eyes shut or have mental cataracts. The man in the Gospel story lived a long time ago. He's still challenging us. That is, if we we're able to see him.



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## **Pope Francis on justice between the generations**

What kind of world do we want to leave to those who come after us, to children who are now growing up? This question not only concerns the environment in isolation; the issue cannot be approached piecemeal. When we ask ourselves what kind of world we want to leave behind, we think in the first place of its general direction, its meaning and its values. Unless we struggle with these deeper issues, I do not believe that our concern for ecology will produce significant results. But if these issues are courageously faced, we are led inexorably to ask other pointed questions: what is the purpose of our life in this world? Why are we here? What is the goal of our work and all our efforts? What need does the earth have of us? It is no longer enough, then, simply to state that we should be concerned for future generations. We need to see that what is at stake is our own dignity. Leaving an inhabitable planet to the future generations is, first and foremost, up to us. The issue is one which dramatically affects us, for it has to do with the ultimate meaning of our earthly sojourn.

- *Laudato Si para 160*

A Lenten day of reflection will be held at Ushaw on Friday 31st March. The day will be based around a prayerful reflection on scripture as part of our Lenten journey, and will include Mass and Stations of the Cross. The day costs £10 (which includes car parking) and will start at 10.15 aiming to finish at 3.15pm. Refreshments will be provided on arrival, and participants will be able to buy lunch in Ushaw's café. To book a place go to <https://ushaw.org.whats-on-at-Ushaw/> or phone 01913738500